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Jan. 18, 1978

Arts Council director taking a leave; closed session held on replacement

By TONY LIOCE
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — Robin Berry, executive director of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, is taking a three-month leave of absence from her job, starting Monday, to be with her mother who is ill in Milwaukee.

The question of who will replace Mrs. Berry has been the subject of some controversy, and was discussed by the council for more than two hours during a closed meeting last night.

After the session, council chairman Donald Aldrich said the name of the replacement would be announced today, after he has discussed the appointment with Mrs. Berry, council staff members and the person to be named.

Last night, however, indications were that the job would go to Bonnie Wyper, who has been a council staff member since July, 1978, serving as director of development for the last seven months.

According to several sources, the appointment of Miss Wyper, even on a temporary basis, may trigger an angry reaction from other staff members who find her difficult to deal with.

The staff, sources say, had been supporting Richard Latham for the job. A staff member since 1976, Latham is the council's director of education.

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ALTHOUGH NO ONE on the council or staff would discuss the matter last night, there are widespread reports that a few staff members have been offered jobs elsewhere and would take them before they would work under Miss Wyper.

Miss Wyper's appointment, sources

say, was supported by Sen. Stephen J. Fortunato Jr., D-Providence, the only arts council member in the General Assembly. Because of that, he has more influence than most council members, sources report.

Miss Wyper has been an active supporter of Fortunato's political campaigns.

Last night's discussion was closed after a unanimous vote by the council on a motion made by Daniel Lecht and seconded by Mahler Ryder. Aldrich said the meeting could be closed legally, since it was to discuss the job performance and character of a person. The state Open Meetings Law allows such discussion behind closed doors.

Mrs. Berry joined the council staff in May, 1974, and became its director of programs the following August. She was named acting director in December, 1976, when Ann Vermel resigned as director, and she officially was named director in September, 1977.

She stressed that her departure from the job is a temporary one.

Miss Wyper first started working with the council in January, 1978, on a contractual basis to conduct a study. The following July she became a full-time staff member and served as its Community Arts Council development director for a year before attaining her present position.

MORNING
PROV. JOURNAL

BULLETIN
AFTERNOON

Head of arts council to take leave

PROVIDENCE — As expected, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts named Bonnie Wyper as executive director this morning. She replaces Robin Berry who is taking a three-month leave of absence.

Donald J. Aldrich, chairman of the council, said this morning that Miss Wyper's appointment was temporary. He added that he fully expected Mrs. Berry to return to her position within three months. Mrs. Berry is taking the leave to be with her mother, who is ill in Milwaukee.

Aldrich also said that he disagreed with a story in this morning's *Journal* which said that Miss Wyper's appointment might bring about a staff revolt. There are always problems when someone gets a job that others feel they could do, he said. He added that Miss Wyper had the "unwavering and unanimous" support of the board of directors.

According to several sources, the appointment of Miss Wyper, even on a temporary basis, might well trigger an

angry reaction from other staff members who find her difficult to deal with.

The staff, sources say, had been supporting Richard Latham for the job. A staff member since 1976, Latham is the council's director of education.

Miss Wyper's appointment, sources say, was supported by Sen. Stephen J. Fortunato Jr., D-Providence, the only arts council member in the General Assembly. Because of that, he has more influence than most council members, sources report.

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Miss Wyper first started working with the council in January, 1978, on a contractual basis to conduct a study. The following July she became a full-time staff member and served as its Community Arts Council development director for a year before attaining her present position.



Robin Berry